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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Set for Small Business Owners to Comment About Excessive Federal Regulatory Enforcement

HELENA, MT – Small business owners across Montana with concerns about excessive enforcement of federal rules will have a chance to voice their complaints at a U.S. Small Business Administration Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Hearing in Billings on Friday, July 23, from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Peter Sorum, Senior Advisor to the SBA's National Ombudsman, will conduct the hearing. The SBA's National Ombudsman's Office holds regional hearings and meetings around the country for business owners to discuss openly, without fear of retaliation, their concerns about federal regulatory compliance practices.

The forum is an opportunity for business owners, community leaders and representatives of trade associations to address the problems of excessive or unfair enforcement of federal regulations. "Small business owners want to play by the rules and comply with federal regulations, and we want to encourage federal regulators to assist business owners with compliance rather than go straight to the penalty stage," said Senior Advisor Sorum.

The Ombudsman's office works closely with more than 35 federal regulatory agencies to resolve complaints about excessive enforcement of federal regulations. "We take the information from these hearings back to Washington D.C. and work directly federal agencies to encourage a less punitive and more small-business friendly regulatory environment," Sorum said.

Congress created the Office of the National Ombudsman through the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996. The act also established 10 regional fairness boards, served by 50 small business owners from across the country. Nancy Warneke-Gaynor of Gaynor River Bend in Whitefish is Montana's board member for Region VIII.

Peter Sorum will conduct the hearing from the Montana Business Incubator located at MSU-Billings, College of Business, 100 Poly Drive, Suite 150. He will be joined there by Warneke and Montana SBA District Director Michelle Johnston and SBA Region VIII Administrator, Mick Ringsak.

Regulatory Fairness Hearing

Information and testimony gathered from the hearing will be included in the ombudsman's annual report to Congress. The report includes findings and recommendations about the regulatory enforcement environment and its effect on small business. Each federal regulatory agency is also rated in the report based upon their responsiveness to small business comments.

The national ombudsman's authority to respond to comments on compliance issues is limited to federal regulatory enforcement matters and does not include concerns about obtaining federal contracts, regulations in general, or securing guaranteed loans. Unfair compliance practices, excessive fines and audits, or burdensome enforcement of federal regulations have been discussed at previous hearings.

The hearing is open to the public; however those wishing to participate must contact the SBA's Rena Carlson in Montana at (406) 441-1081 prior to the hearing. Should a small business owner or representative be unable to attend, written testimony may be sent in advance of the hearing to be included in the public record.

For additional information about the national ombudsman and this hearing, visit the National Ombudsman's Web site at www.sba.gov/ombudsman.

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